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PLANS VERSUS PROJECTS¹

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Successful extension work today, as never before, is dependent upon well-drawn plans of work. So many agencies are seeking the extension agents' help in trying to reach rural people, and so many demands are made on his time, that he makes little progress with his extension program, unless he plans his activities and schedules his time. Indeed in county after county, extension programs have broken down, and little organized systematic work is being done in attaining the project objectives.

Perhaps we depend too much upon our so-called projects. These fail to give needed details of procedure. Often they are trade-marked with the same subject matter and the same devices and all too sketchy procedures, State by State. Technically speaking, a project is really a broad formal statement of objectives, relationships and method for a particular subject-matter field, as dairy husbandry, nutrition, fruit growing, and so on. This doesn't help the county agent much or the specialist. It is only as we work down to specific situations and procedures in each such field and lay down detailed outlined procedures and responsibilities that we really get down to earth. And that has to be done for each county as well as for the State. Moreover, each one must build a plan, adapt subject matter and procedure to his own situations, resources, and capabilities. You do not plan when you merely accept the other fellow's outline.

Nor can the extension specialist fail herein. He must think out and plan procedures for the State as well as know his subject matter. Really, he should not separate subject matter and method. He should think of the two together, and plan the two for differing situations. Nor can he pass to others the designing, making, and use for the State, of needed teaching aids. He must have ideas on effective circulars, circular letters, film strips, and other illustrative material, news information, discussion outlines, and other tools. He must work some of these out; make them available for use to county agents. If he specializes only in the subject matter of his field, his usefulness in extension work is very limited.

Obviously, too, the county extension agent cannot "pass the buck" to the specialist, either. The agent knows his local situations and needs,

¹/ Delivered at the Missouri Agricultural Extension Conference, Columbia, December 10, 1936.

Distribution: A copy of this circular has been sent to each extension director, and to each agricultural-college library and experiment-station library.

his people's ways, his problems. If he doesn't think this subject matter and procedure through for himself, put into the local planning some of his own ideas, and pledge himself to carry out the greatest part of the work locally, well then, he has only another project on his hands. If the thing, the so-called project, meets a real need, why then, county agent, home demonstration agent, or club agent, must function in planning and in carrying out the plans he has made for himself. Difficult it may be in these days to plan and carry out a schedule, yet better one plan well done, well carried out, than an imposing "program" of many "projects" that brings few results.

So we see in State after State, more and more reliance placed upon our supervisors to improve our programs and plans. A good State supervisor does not have a biased interest in any project. He knows the people county by county. He knows their needs. He knows how to organize them around a need to be met. He knows his agents and their individual strength, weaknesses, resources. He helps the specialist to get down to the needs of this county and that. He helps him to see the farm or home problem in the light of related situations. He helps him to coordinate subject-matter recommendations and planning with the recommendations and plans of other specialists. He is interested in seeing that local leaders, county agent, and specialist all get results.

And, of course, he helps the agent to study his local situations, get data on local conditions, adjust recommendations, and plan and organize the projected work locally. This he follows too from time to time, by visits to the agent, to note progress with the plans, to help him meet this or that phase.

Now what makes a plan work? You know as well as I do that plans of work cannot exercise magic. Many plans I have helped specialists and county agents to make have worked out 100 percent. Others have failed miserably, despite the use of the most interesting and appealing circular letters, circulars, posters, cards, and other devices. What is the cue in influencing people to getting them to accept these or those recommendations?

Perhaps my experience and my progress in planning are marked by the same steps that mark the experience of you older extension workers. At first, starting out in extension work after a period of resident teaching, I too carried the gospel of a better agriculture, and thought the gospel in itself would be sufficient, that the people needed only to know of better ways and better practices in agriculture. And what a deluge of information has flooded the agricultural areas. Bulletin upon bulletin, circular upon circular, meeting upon meeting. Why doesn't this do the job, why are so many still unmoved?

Ah, poor salesmanship was the answer. So in our planning we followed the precepts of salesmanship. We dressed up this, fixed up that, thought, worked, planned in terms of selling. Everything was made as attractive as it could be. Leaders - some of them at least - were fired with zeal to sell this or that to their neighbors, to make certain goals. We even had a sort of ballyhoo - offered baits of various kinds to get people to come out to

meetings. High-pressure campaigns were put on. People were often over-sold, accepted practices they did not need or could not use economically. Naturally, you cannot mention the word campaign in some States today. Yet, I believe in the campaign type of planning, provided it is not a "selling" campaign but is planned in accordance with certain great principles of education.

At this stage, I learned that a few principles of education and the laws of learning had the utmost significance in extension planning. My problem now is to learn these principles and laws better, and how to adapt them in extension teaching. My experience has taught me that nothing else will help us to approach the basic problems of teaching through extension as fundamentally as these principles and laws.

We are teachers, we are educators. Education involves far more than fact dissemination, learning skills, or giving service. With the teaching must come a learning of insights, appreciations, attitudes, understanding of experience, knowledges, and principles, and ability to apply experience, knowledge, principles to other situations and problems. Education develops the inquiring mind, the problem-solving ability.

Thus, we see our extension nutritionists not content to merely explain and work for the adoption of a stereotyped program of practices, so much milk, so much whole-cereal food, so many vegetables and fruits in the daily diet. No, they are beginning to teach so that the farm woman understands principles, will analyze differing situations and needs, and apply subject matter and principles to solve her own problems in her own situation. She must learn how to provide the same protective elements and food values under her individual condition of home, farm, local supplies, health of her youngsters, and pocketbook.

So learning is more than acquiring^{facts}. Learning is a change in behavior. Now people tend not to change, unless they have a sense of annoyance with a situation, have a problem to solve, a want to fill. Consequently, our extension people are learning to plan so that this problem awareness is the first approach. The agents plan to use local leaders to study local practices, habits, situations. Thereby, the people locally learn of a problem and how it may affect them. And of course, extension people learn a lot of things too, and change their recommendations accordingly. It is easy enough to interest most parents in a more rational diet regimen for their children once they see the caries and undernourishment. But as adults score their own food and health habits, inventory their health condition, maybe they become aware of problems of indigestion, nervousness, and other forms of illness, for which they may now seek a solution.

Now, I believe in improving pastures, thoroughly. But if the basic problem of a dairyman is winter food cost and obtaining sufficient winter feed for his cows, then that is the problem which should be felt. So the dairyman, the agronomist, and the farm-management specialist, with the county agent and local leaders study the whole problem of feed supplies and costs, and tackle the most important phase of it.

Our next concern in planning is to develop solutions for these wants -- solutions which are practical, economical, and easy to apply. These recommendations must be developed in terms of the needs and situations of the majority of the people too. Extension agents need to be ever watchful that the solutions offered are not so costly, or so difficult that only those farms already well advanced in the enterprise can adopt them. It may not be easy for many farm women to supply two fruits and two vegetables a day. This must be made easy and sure if the program is to be made to go as it should. The desired changes and the principal recommendations, moreover, should be phrased as terse injunctions or directions. People must be able to grasp quickly and clearly what it is expected they should do. The directions must be explicit. The recommendations cannot be hidden, cannot be generalized. Contrast for example this recommendation: "Use good seed of approved varieties" with the following: "Use certified seed of Prichard for your early crop, Marglow for the main season", and "Buy or hatch chicks early" with "Buy or hatch chicks before April 1." Or "Raise heights of working surfaces" with "Raise the table so that the top is even with the wrists when your arms hang down."

I have had quite a little to do with the popular "grow healthy chicks" plans of work in several States. We found in one State on analyzing the reports of results of some 2,700 farmers, that there did not seem to be any correlation in results with those who accepted the practices and some who did not. Some of the latter seemed to get as good results as some who followed all the practices. On studying the practices recommended, I found, however, that they were in such general terms as "Buy clean chicks." Well what is a clean chick? It looks clean to me. It may not be clean to you. "Keep your brooder house clean." My opinion of what cleanliness is may be a lot different from yours. And so on.

If the recommendations are clear-cut, simple, explicit, they will be more convincing to the individual as representing a practical solution to the problem which he feels. This then is the next stage in our planning -- to have individuals convince themselves that there is a solution to their wants and their problems, and that those practices offer the way out. I know that extension agents are overloaded. I know that many of them would be far more satisfied if they could concentrate on fewer problems. Because they are overloaded, they cannot perhaps give the time to building these stages of understandings and appreciations that I am trying to sketch as so necessary. Yet on the other hand, this also explains why we sometimes do not move faster in influencing people to change. My own experience in planning has been that if we take time enough, analyze problems, know their local aspects, get people to understand these problems and how they may be affected, develop with them the idea that this or that solution offers the way out, then we shall do much better educational work and reach far more persons.

Well you can hammer on a problem and on solutions, and yet not get the results anticipated. This is because so often in our plans we do not systematize the means of getting the people to act, to do something about

it. Let us hold before us eternally that learning is change and that unless people act there is little change. Our clients to learn must move, do something about it, weigh and judge information, analyze situations, question, try skills and practices, attempt to understand principles, experiences, knowledge, apply experience and knowledge to their problems. This is the constant challenge before the extension people, to obtain action. Teaching which merely unloads information, disseminates facts, attempts to prove by demonstration and argument, produces little change. Learning is a product of stimulus - response, experience, and result. How shall we plan to stimulate people to act, to respond.

There are a good many devices used. Most successful perhaps as done in home demonstration work, is to have people who come to group meetings sign up that they will adopt some or all of the recommended practices and report the results later. In the agricultural conservation work farmers sign "work sheets". In our agricultural extension work it has been done by correspondence and at meetings or through personal solicitation of local leaders. Local firms often help by making it easy for individuals to get material and supplies needed. Our circulars, our letters, our meetings, our talks should revolve about this point constantly, and directly or indirectly influence people to do something about it, to act.

As we study and apply the basic principles which govern teaching, we recognize increasingly that the learning process is not consummated unless the learners, our farmers, farm women, and young people, are successful with the recommendations, practices, studies, attempts to solve problems which they have adopted.

If the solution is inappropriate, if skill is lacking, if the directions are misapplied or misunderstood there is little learning. In fact, individuals may become prejudiced against further trials or other teaching. Therefore, in any plan, the teaching should be directed to help the average man win success. Unless he is satisfied he will not go on. The learning experience must be satisfying. More than that the experience must be understood, as must the knowledge and principles gained, and with this must come increasingly, ability to apply experience, knowledge, principles, judgment to other situations and problems.

Now we have come to the stage in teaching where subject meetings, circulars, bulletins of information may be multiplied. Here the extension agent manages the meetings, demonstrations, field contacts so that he keeps in touch with the experiences of the people with the new practices and supplies additional information and helps to make success more sure for these people. Here he helps them apply subject matter and principles to their own specific situations. Then learning the desired changes, satisfactions, and proper attitudes will be the more assured.

In conclusion extension teaching, extension plans, to be most effective, must increasingly be developed in terms of educational laws and principles. This implies on the part of the extension worker:

Clarity as to the larger aims in education.

Clarity with reference to the desired changes to be brought about.

Knowledge of human beings as organisms and how organisms learn.

Knowledge and skill in setting teaching situations and in using the tools of learning.^{2/}

The stimuli to me are balanced, widespread recognition of specific wants. The solutions increasingly are being made more practical as extension workers and local leaders study and know the local situations. Appropriate responses are sought, action toward the desired changes more carefully planned. Lastly, the teaching, more and more, is being planned to make the learner successful with the changes he has attempted, satisfied with the solutions he has adapted, and the more ready for the next problem, the next solution, the next response, and the next satisfaction, either by himself or with the aid of extension workers.

For me, in reward for my little contribution, satisfaction will come if you will study your own plans and projects. How do they look to you in the light of these few elementary things just discussed? What can you do to assure greater knowledge of local problems? Can you improve the solutions offered? What must you plan to do if you want to get the larger and more satisfying responses? What must you do to your plans to do better teaching, bring about desired changes and satisfactions for the average farmer or homemaker in this or that county? What change in your behavior, your thinking, your fact-searching, your attitudes, your planning will you bring about?

^{2./} Kruse, P. J. Psychology for the Extension Worker. Outline of course. Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y. (Not published).



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